

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

May 26, 2022

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Michael A. Slubowski
President and CEO
Trinity Health
20555 Victory Parkway
Livonia, MI 48152

Mr. Bob Ritz
President and CEO
MercyOne
1449 NW 128th Street
Clive, IA 50325

Dear Mr. Slubowski and Mr. Ritz:

I noted with interest your recent announcement that Trinity Health will become the sole parent of MercyOne,¹ and I write seeking additional information to ensure that Iowa patients served by MercyOne will benefit from this transaction and will continue to have access to essential health care services in their communities.

MercyOne health care facilities are a presence in communities across Iowa. As you know, its 16 medical centers, 27 affiliate organizations, and over 420 care sites handle over 3.3 million patient visits across Iowa each year. According to your joint release announcing the agreement, Trinity health “will bring unified strategies and operations to MercyOne’s care sites, including one set of operations.” During this transition, I urge you to make sure that integrating MercyOne into Trinity Health does not come at the expense of Iowans’ access to personalized care from providers who they know and trust.

Additionally, in an April 19th article regarding the acquisition, the *Des Moines Register* reported: “The integration is expected to create long-term financial “efficiencies” for both health systems, though patients should not expect lower costs as a result of the merger, Slubowski said.”² I encourage Trinity Health to use any cost savings it should realize as the sole parent of MercyOne to improve patient care, lower patient costs, and make health care more accessible for underserved Iowans.

Right now, Iowans’ budgets are being squeezed by rising prices, and they can ill afford to see prices for essential health care services also rise as a consequence of this acquisition. According to a Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (MedPAC) review of published research on hospital consolidation, the “preponderance of evidence suggests that hospital consolidation leads

¹ <https://www.trinity-health.org/news/trinity-health-to-acquire-commonspirit-healths-share-of-mercyone-health-system-become-sole-parent>

² <https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/2022/04/19/mercy-mercyone-hospital-iowa-acquired-trinity-health-owner/7367139001/>

to higher prices.”³ One specific study found that prices at hospitals purchased by an out-of-market hospital system rose approximately 17% more than for unacquired hospitals.⁴ With these considerations in mind, and on behalf of the Iowans that I serve who will be impacted by this acquisition, I respectfully request replies to the following:

1. Is the above statement regarding financial efficiencies accurate?
 - a. If so, and MercyOne patients should not expect lower costs due to the acquisition, how does Trinity Health intend to use projected financial efficiencies, and how will this benefit patients?
2. As Trinity Health works to integrate MercyOne’s records and create a single electronic health record:
 - a. How does it intend to ensure that patients’ private medical information is protected?
 - b. How does it intend to prevent billing errors and ensure compliance with consumer protections, including the surprise billing protections included in the *No Surprises Act*?
3. Since 2005, 98 rural hospitals nationwide have been forced to close.⁵ What plans does Trinity Health have in place to make sure Iowans are not hurt by facility closures, including cutbacks to necessary health services?

As you work to finalize the agreement and complete regulatory filings, I believe it is critical that patients across Iowa have confidence that MercyOne will remain an integral provider of a wide range of health services. To ensure consideration of your responses prior to completion of the merger, which you expect this summer, please provide answers no later than June 15th, 2022. Should you have any questions, please contact Will Binger at Will.Binger@mail.house.gov or Robert Krebs at Robert.Krebs@mail.house.gov on my staff.

Sincerely,



Cindy Axne
Member of Congress

Cc: Mr. Lloyd H. Dean
CEO, CommonSpirit Health

³ https://www.medpac.gov/wp-content/uploads/import_data/scrape_files/docs/default-source/reports/mar20_entirereport_sec.pdf

⁴ <https://www.kff.org/health-costs/issue-brief/what-we-know-about-provider-consolidation/>

⁵ <https://www.shepscenter.unc.edu/programs-projects/rural-health/rural-hospital-closures/>